

Testimony in Support of State Library Funding

February 21, 2017

To the Members of the Elementary and Secondary Education Sub-Committee of the Appropriations Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am the Director of the South Windsor Public Library and have the privilege of serving on the State Library Board.

I am unable to attend the Public Hearing concerning the State Library budget today, but would like to express my thoughts on the Governor's recommendations as a public library administrator who has worked in Connecticut's libraries since the inception of the statewide services critically threatened by the latest proposal.

When Connecticard (now borrowIT CT) and Connecticar (now deliverIT CT) were instituted in the early 1970s, our state was taking advantage of its compact size by creating programs that would equalize access to all public library collections for all citizens in a simple, straightforward way: let borrowers use public libraries wherever they were, whether at home, work, or on vacation, return the materials wherever they were when finished, and use a single, dedicated delivery service to return the items to the owning library. The spending limitations of small local libraries or stressed urban libraries would not restrict their patrons' use of library materials; suburban libraries would not be pressed to purchase specialized materials more suited to larger research libraries; the delivery service would reduce the need for borrowers to make individual trips to return materials. It was a "regional" system that considered the whole state as one "region," and it worked. In spite of the need to reorganize the delivery system to accommodate greatly expanded numbers of items moving between libraries (some 15,000 items per day); in spite of the electronic universe and changing demand for print materials (nearly 4,000,000 items were loaned as part of reciprocal borrowing last year), it still works.

The Connecticard reimbursement program scheduled for elimination in the Governor's proposed budget (\$806,000 appropriated for this year, reduced to \$781,820 by holdbacks) is the direct aid to local libraries that recognizes actual participation in the reciprocal borrowing system. All funds in the program go directly and exclusively to participating libraries, where funds are used to support the program locally.

In my own library, CCard funds (an average of \$17,000 per year for the last five years) are used to purchase and update the computers that run our circulation and reference systems, as well as the computers used by the public to discover the materials they need, whether in our library

or elsewhere. The funds allow us to respond when unexpected technology-related expenses arise, such as a need to upgrade \$10,000-worth of switches in our network last year. When CEN, our internet provider, unexpectedly went from a free statewide network “backbone” to a self-supporting network due to state budget cuts after local budgets had been determined, our CCard funds allowed us to afford the \$5,400 annual fee. When state budget cuts tripled the cost of our membership in the CT Library Consortium, the cooperative that negotiates purchasing discounts for library materials and provides opportunities for resource sharing and continuing education, our CCard grant gave us the flexibility to absorb the change.

Connecticut municipalities allocate only 1.2% of their tax dollars to libraries, and state support ranks in the bottom tenth in the nation, yet we created a system of reciprocal borrowing that gives every citizen of the state free access to 15.7 million items in nearly 200 public libraries.

The Connecticard reciprocal borrowing program is an efficient, economical example of state government working on its citizens’ behalf, and I strongly urge that you maintain its funding.

Sincerely,

Mary J. Etter
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